



14.10.1977

Prof. Sir Karl Popper

My dear Karl,

Thank you for your letter of October 4th. I appreciate your remarks on the origin of the ideas of objective knowledge and world 3.

If those ideas are found in nuce in the L. d. F. and in Tarski's Wahrheitsbegriff, then I have a different problem: How come they were not recognized by anyone?

What seems to me to be the case is this. Both you and Tarski (and all logicians and mathematicians) reject psychologism. You want to dissociate propositions, inference rules, and the like from thought processes. But surely this can be done without assuming that propositions and other constructs have a life of their own. Instead of adopting a Platonist doctrine one may adopt, with regard to such objects only, a fictionist stance: we pretend they are "there", ready made, for otherwise we would be unable to deal with infinite sets of propositions and the like. Incidentally, Tarski, who is a materialist and, more precisely, a nominalist, dislikes all talk of propositions and calls them 'sentences'; I am sure he would flare up if told that his work on truth contained the embryo of your doctrine of the objective mind.

So much for the new problem your statement poses. And now for your complaint about my misinterpreting your thought in my paper "Testability today", which I read at the Boston University symposium in your honour, in 1969. I am very sorry to learn that you think I have misrepresented you on that occasion. I will revise again the L.S.D. and try to see where I sinned. But you are certainly wrong in your interpretation of my views if you claim that "they are all in the L. d. F." In that paper I formulate a number of views that seem to me to be uncongenial with yours, among them the following:

- (i) some scientific theories contain irrefutable hypotheses;
- (ii) some scientific theories are confirmable but irrefutable;
- (iii) no extremely general scientific theory is testable: only very specific theories (or theoretical models) are empirically testable;
- (iv) some extremely general scientific theories are so general

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that they also count as metaphysical (or ontological) theories;

(v) consequently (a) refutability is not the mark of science and (b) there is no border line between science and metaphysics, hence the problem of demarcation dissolves.

(In all the above I used 'theory' in the strict sense of hypothetical-deductive system, not in the loose sense of single hypothesis.)

Perhaps you will accept (i). But how about the other theses?

I am glad you'll be giving a Darwin lecture on the emergence of the mind. I wish you were strictly Darwinian (Notebook 11) and regarded the mental abilities as brain functions emerged, alongside the others, in the course of evolution--in our case both natural and cultural. But you are a dualist.

Here again I have a conjecture that you will disprove, namely this. You wish to preserve the qualitative variety of the world and, in particular, the wonderful peculiarities of "the mental" and the cultural objects (the inmates of your world 3). You are, in short, a pluralist and an emergentist. So am I. Only, I am a property pluralist, not a substance pluralist: instead of assuming that there are many substances, I just assume that there are many kinds of thing (or concrete or material object). As a consequence of your pluralism you dislike reductionism. So do I. But instead of rejecting reductionism in toto I try to keep a watered down version of it: one that gives us hope of explaining novelty with the help of (though not fully in terms of) the old. In short, I propose--and bolster up with examples--the thesis of partial reduction. In particular, I do not want the mind explained away; but I want it explained in scientific terms rather than described in ordinary language or, worse, theological, terms.

Enough quarrelling for today. Anyway those are some of the things I would have told you had it not been for the London airport strike. (I had to start teaching on the 11th, so I could not risk trying to leave that day from London, as I had planned after my first attempt failed--and my trip to Sweden was lengthened by 18 hours.)

Last, but not least, I am terribly sorry about Hennie's operation. I hope chemotherapy will help. Also, taking one's mind off those miseries by continuing to work. My own arthritic pains must be trifles compared with Hennie's. I am looking forward to my 3rd operation next month: each time it has been a great relief.

Love to both of you.


Mario Bunge

